



Achieving the Dream™

South Central College Virtual Commencement Speech June 25, 2020

Dr. Karen A. Stout

Good evening and thank you Dr. Parker for inviting me to share this special moment with all of the South Central College community and especially the Class of 2020!

I remember my first commencement. It was my father's graduation from college. I was eight years old. I don't have a photograph or a video to capture the moment he walked across the stage. But the imagery, is etched in my mind, and inspires what I do today, every day. Graduates, I hope today will be etched in your minds, as well as in the minds of your families and friends, your children, and all those who have supported you along the way. Celebrating your achievements is something you should carry with you every day.

These are special moments that we are celebrating differently in these uncertain times. These are moments that are timeless in their meaning and significance.

The Class of 2020 was always destined to be amazing! But now this Class, individuals as a group of graduates, are a chapter in a history book—new graduates prepared to lead forward new and important efforts that will lead to the recovery of your community, your state, and your country. You become part of a generation I will call the “Great Reset” generation.

This pandemic has affected all of us in a number of ways and has tested our resiliency. But at the heart of our response? Shining examples of creativity, resiliency, and leadership with lessons that you will take with you as you shape your own future.

I've been in awe of how your college, and community colleges across the nation, have shifted quickly and dramatically in countless ways:

- To supporting students and their families as they moved entirely to emergency remote learning
- To amazing faculty and staff innovation designing creative ways to reach students where they are, and with what they need
- To moving their colleges into the center of their communities—donating PPE,

using 3-D printing and manufacturing to produce protective equipment, turning parking lots into WiFi hot spots, and even turning campuses into testing sites or medical response sites.

I've been so inspired by your faculty and staff. They have transformed entire semesters into online learning, many without the necessary infrastructure. They are developing and implementing new policies around grading and academic progression. They are thinking creatively about how students can access and have the supports they need.

Which brings me to you, the students.

You have, in an unprecedented situation, more than rose to the occasion. Some of you or your loved ones were sick with COVID-19. Many of you are essential frontline workers. Some of you have been homeschooling your children as you tried to complete your classes. Some of you may have lost jobs.

Through all of this, you made it.

You did the hard work.

Your perseverance, your resilience, your grit – those qualities have always been what makes community colleges students so remarkable. And you did it, because you know just how important this education is—to you, to your loved ones, and to your communities.

I'm reminded of journalist and author James Fallows' words, who remarked at Achieving the Dream's DREAM 2020 conference—just before the pandemic:

"Community colleges are America's institutions of the moment."

Think about that: Community colleges are America's institutions of the moment.

And you are part of America's institutions of the moment.

You are the problem solvers of the moment.

You are at the heart of our recovery from COVID-19.

You are part of a new chapter in history.

And I'm proud to be with you all at this extraordinary time.

Please take some time to reflect on all that you have accomplished. Take time to thank your professors, your friends and fellow students, and most of all, your families and loved ones for their support along the way.

I look forward to following your success as you start your new journey.